

**Speech by the Guest of Honour, Mr. Gerry Finnegan,  
ILO Representative for Malawi, Mozambique & Zambia on the  
occasion of the General Assembly of the Zambia Federation of  
Associations of Women in Business (ZFAWIB), 7 March 2008**

Chairperson of ZFAWIB, Ms Christine Mulundika,  
Members of the Executive Board  
Loyal members of ZFAWIB

First of all, I wish to thank the Executive Board of ZFAWIB for extending their invitation to be to be the Guest of Honour on this important occasion. Indeed, I was delighted to be able to accept this prestigious invitation, and to give it priority in the very busy schedule that I have for today. Many of us have known each other for quite a long time, and our level of interactions have been warm, friendly and mutually supportive. However, I acknowledge and recognize the formality, importance and significance of today's meeting, and I come here in a more official role than usual.

I know that it is no coincidence that you are holding your meeting in what I might refer to as "International Women's Month", in the middle of "International Women's Week", and the day before "International Women's Day", 8 March 2008.

This year, with the theme of "Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment", we have seen a true milestone event in Zambia, with the organizing by the Bank of Zambia of the Exhibition of financial Institutions at Mulungushi International Conference Centre, at which some 12 commercial banks and 10 or more MFIs participated.

This has truly been an occasion when the "bar has been raised" in support of women, and in particular women entrepreneurs, in Zambia. May I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the Bank of Zambia (BoZ) for this important inclusive and developmental initiative. I have already assured the Governor of the Bank that the ILO – on behalf of the UN System in Zambia – stands ready to assist and partner with BoZ in promoting greater financial inclusiveness.

I believe that increasingly, women – and women entrepreneurs in particular – are taking their rightful place in the centre stage in Zambia. This is largely the result of the combined and cumulative efforts of:

- Government, through its National Gender Policy and its evolving Gender Support Programme being developed by GIDD and MoWGID, and indeed the creation of the MoWGID;
- The creation of the Citizens' Economic Empowerment commission (CEEC);
- The civil society and in particular the influential women's organizations such as NGOCC, Women For Change, etc.;

- Representative, member-based associations of women entrepreneurs, such as ZFAWIB, WEDAZ, etc.;
- The donors or cooperating partners – who are taking a renewed and increasing interest in supporting gender in Zambia (e.g. Norway, Netherlands, Ireland, UK, US, Canada, Sweden);
- The regional economic communities (RECs) such as COMESA, which helped with the creation of ZFAWIB and the FEMCOM; and
- The efforts of the UN System in Zambia, including UNDP, UNFPA, UNIFEM – and I am pleased to say, my own organization – the ILO.

The key here is that this could not have been possible without these combined and cumulative efforts.

I go back again to what I said about “representative member-based associations of women entrepreneurs”. There is no doubt that in Zambia, ZFAWIB has been working hard to promote the cause of women in business – often against all odds! It has also had to devote a lot of effort to resource mobilization, working closely on its partnerships with COMESA, various Government units, a range of donors, and the UN System in Zambia, including the ILO.

This has been a tough and demanding assignment – given the meagre resources available to ZFAWIB. However, in the context of the more positive and optimistic scenario that I outlined earlier, I believe that this is a vitally important General Assembly for ZFAWIB. This is the occasion on which ZFAWIB needs to review and reflect on its own performance, and ask the following questions of itself:

1. What have been the successes, and what have been the failures in the period under review?
2. What are the plans and strategies that ZFAWIB needs to adopt to match this new and optimistic environment and to capitalize on the opportunities?
3. What is the best team that can bring ZFAWIB forward for the next period – 2-3 years? And who should be the captain of the team?
4. Who are the strategic partners that ZFAWIB can count on for support in the years ahead? And who are potential partners that ZFAWIB should engage and nurture?
5. In this respect, and as “women in business”, I believe that ZFAWIB should be seeking strategic alliances with “traditional partners” in Government, the UN System and the donor community. But it should also be actively seeking “non-traditional” partnerships in the private sector: commercial companies, the financial institutions, and so on.

This is the time when members should be asking themselves, “It’s not what ZFAWIB can do for me, it’s what I can do for ZFAWIB” – and what can we do for our sisters who are in business or who are eager to get into business.

There is a new space within which women can start and grow their businesses. It is a "policy" space; it is a "financial" space; it is a "developmental" space; and perhaps above all it is a "business" space.

Without meaning to be too controversial, first and foremost, ZFAWIB should draw lessons from its own name, but if I might suggest it, in reverse order. That means:

- "Business" – above all, ZFAWIB needs to be an organization that promotes more and better business for its members;
- "Women in Business" (WIB) – representing the views, interests and concerns of women who are serious about business.
- "Federation ... of Associations" (FA) – to try and bring together various associations and branches of women in business, including WEDAZ, among others.
- "Zambia" – The CEEC has also created new opportunities for Zambian women to prosper and grow in developing their own indigenous enterprises.

As a long-time friend and supporter of ZFAWIB and women entrepreneurs in Zambia, I want to assure you of the continuing support of the ILO – as a champion of gender equality in the world of work – and of the ILO's commitment and supportive role in linking you to the broader UN family in Zambia, and ensuring that the interests of women entrepreneurs, including of ZFAWIB, will be part of our agenda as we work with our partners in Zambia.

I wish you all the strength and courage to fulfil your important objectives this day, and the wisdom to select the best captain and team to bring to forward for the coming years.

I thank you all for your attention.